



MEAT CONSUMPTION AND MASCULINITY

MAY 2022: SPECIAL TOPIC RESEARCH PROJECT
SUPERVISER: MARY CORCORAN_FOOD TOPIC
STUDENT: STEPHANIE BARTLEY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY: MAYNOOTH
UNIVERSITY, KILDARE
WORDCOUNT: 10,049

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the staff at the Sociology Department of Maynooth University. The last three years have been difficult for all students with the Covid19 pandemic and regulations. The department have been innovative in dealing with this and constantly strived to ensure that the students were getting the best experience they could. I would like to thank all my lecturers for the education I have received in my time at Maynooth specifically Dr Colin Coulter, Dr Aphra Kerr, Dr Delma Byrne, and Prof Seán Ó Riain.

I would like to express my gratitude to my special topic leader Prof Mary Corcoran. Mary has consistently supported me in my experience at Maynooth, from my entrance into the University, to my first live lecture and my weekly special topic classes. Mary was incredibly supportive, encouraging and always brought a sense of enjoyment to every class. I feel incredibly privileged to have had Mary as my lecturer and supervisor.

I would like to give a special thank you to my uncle Brendan Bartley. Brendan has always encouraged me to learn, since the moment I could read. From buying me encyclopaedias as a child right through to debates about sociology, Brendan has been my shining light. I will be eternally grateful for all that he has done for me throughout my life.

Abstract

The social, political, and economic culture in Ireland has undergone a radical transformation in recent decades. The cultural identity for many Irish people has become more diverse. The identity of men and women is no longer governed by strict hierarchal organisations associated with religiosity and the patriarchy. As women gained access to the labour market, domestic roles have become less defined. The gender order which placed men at the top of the social hierarchy no longer dictates the status of the individual. This project set out to explore the changing conceptualisations of the masculine identity in Ireland using vegetarianism as a tool of measurement. The understanding of the masculine identity in Ireland is ambiguous. The consumption of meat has historically been associated with masculinity. The findings of this qualitative research project suggest that the deviant choice to become vegetarian carries a stigma for men and their identity. The decision to abstain from meat indicates that vegetarian men may be more comfortable with the changing conceptualisations of masculinity in contemporary Irish society.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	5
1.1 Overview and Aim of Research	5
1.2 Background and Introduction	6
1.3 Methodology.....	7
1.4 Rationale and Justification	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	8
2.2 Literature Review Introduction.....	8
2.3: Literature Review Conclusion	20
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	22
3:1 Research Method and Sampling	22
3.2 Gathering the Data.....	24
3.3 Challenges for the Research	24
3.4 Ethical Considerations.....	26
Chapter 4: Findings and discussion.....	27
4.1: Findings Introduction	27
4.2: Conclusion and Summary of Findings.....	39
Chapter 5: Research Project Conclusion	42
5.1 Implications for Research.....	43

This page is intentionally blank.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview and Aim of Research

This project will look at challenges to traditional notions of masculinity and explore the changing conceptualisations of masculinity in Ireland. This will be viewed through the lens of food and eating patterns. Food is a social hybrid, it is a commodity, a part of nature, and an expression of culture. Food plays a key role in our identity, socially and culturally (Jacobsen 2004). Therefore, as actors we have agency to represent ourselves in society through our food choices. The Irish cuisine and food culture is heavily reliant on meat, with the traditional Irish dinner consisting of meat, vegetables, and potatoes (Kelly and Ciclitira 2011). In recent years in Ireland there has been a steady increase in vegetarianism (Leahy, Lyons, and Richard 2011). Numerous studies have suggested that there is a link between the consumption of meat and the masculine identity (Lax and Mertig 2020, Sumpter: 2015). This project will bring together the changing conceptualisations of masculinity in Ireland and the agency that men use to represent themselves through vegetarianism. The overarching question in this project is:

To what extent does male vegetarianism challenge traditional notions of the masculine identity in Ireland?

The purpose of this project is to understand the agency actors use to present themselves in society. It also seeks to explore the interactions between individuals in society on a micro level. For this reason, the central theory used in this project will be Erving Goffman's (1959) symbolic interactionist theory. In his theory of dramaturgy Goffman proposed that we are all actors in our everyday lives, and society is the stage

we perform on. He argued that although we are socialised to act according to our assigned roles we can use our own agency to represent ourselves in society.

1.2 Background and Introduction

Traditional gender roles in Ireland were clearly defined and re-enforced by the Catholic Church right up the 1970's. Women carried out domestic duties while men worked outside the home and provided for the family. This is known as the 'breadwinner model.' As the church rule collapsed and Ireland entered the European Union, women moved from the private home sphere to the public work sphere (Fine Davis 2015:5-9). Around the same time neoliberal economics and policies were gaining popularity in many anglophone countries. Neoliberalism promotes individuality by taking the emphasis away from State funding and encouraging a deregulated public market. This led to free trade agreements in the 1990's, which eventually led to globalisation. For many western countries including Ireland, globalisation has brought about a new diversity in culture and identity (Sumpter,2015).

These economic, social, and cultural changes are conflated with rapid changes in technology. The labour force in Ireland, once associated with hard physical labour has become increasingly competitive (Darcy 2019). Contemporary Irish society and culture has not only been shaped by changes in social structures, it has also been shaped by the agency of actors. Within the last decade the people of Ireland have used their agency to bring about social change, based on equality and rights. In 2014 Ireland became the first country in history to publicly vote in favour of same-sex marriage (Tiernan 2020). In 2018 the abortion ban, which had been put in place decades earlier was lifted following a referendum (Kennedy 2020). The Irish identity has become more

diverse, and is no longer restricted by the hierarchal arrangements associated with the patriarchy. The traditional gender order places men at the top of the societal hierarchy in all areas privately and publicly (Connell 2005). As individual identities evolve and become more fluid, and gender roles are less defined men begin to lose the benefits of this 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 2005). Taking this into consideration this project will ask two further sub-questions:

1. Does male vegetarianism indicate an openness to the changing conceptualisations of masculinity?
2. Do traditional values indicate a resistance to the changing conceptualisations of masculinity?

1.3 Methodology

This project will systematically review the available literature under the themes of gender, the masculine identity, and meat. This project will further seek to answer these questions using a qualitative method, by carrying out eight, one-hour, semi-structured interviews. A set of questions was designed based on the three themes. Four of these participants were non-vegetarian and four were vegetarian, which created a comparative study. The participants were purposively selected based on their demography; cisgender, millennial males, who grew up in Ireland. They were also selected based on their vegetarian or non-vegetarian status. The study also used snowball sampling by asking participants if they could recommend any peers who would like to do an interview. The findings are analysed in the discussion section. The implications and recommendations of the research will be including in the conclusion.

1.4 Rationale and Justification

Modern gender studies in Ireland tend to focus on women and their journey from oppression, toward liberation. Irish men benefitted from the traditional ideals associated with the patriarchy so perhaps there was no reason in the past to carry out studies on men. As a result, there have been very few qualitative research studies carried out on masculinity and changing notions of masculinity in Ireland (Darcy 2019). Moreover, there are very few studies carried out on vegetarianism in Ireland. Within the scope of the research, there were no qualitative studies found on meat and masculinity in Ireland. With so few studies carried out, this project may serve as a preliminary, pilot study. It would be quite difficult to draw any conclusions as the sample size is so small, the resources are limited, and there is a time restraint on the research project. Instead, this project is opening the conversation and shining a light on a topic that is quite relevant to contemporary Irish society.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.2 Literature Review Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to look at the knowledge that is currently available on the three main themes of: gender, the masculine identity, and male vegetarianism. The review of the literature will set out the arguments, theories, concepts, and critiques of key authors in the field. In doing so the review will also provide the historical context on the three main themes. The first part of the literature review will look at the arguments on the gender order. The focus will narrow down to look at masculinity as an identity and further focus on masculinity in the Irish context. The final part of the review will look at studies on vegetarianism, relating to masculinity and the relevant studies relating to Irish masculinity.

According to Connell (1987) the gender order is reproduced through three dimensions, power, labour, and cathexis. The gender order creates an imbalance of power. Gender inequality is reproduced through labour where women do not receive the same recognition as men. Cathexis refers to the belief that men have desire for women as objects, and the role of women is to produce children. This re-enforces the power of men over women, by arguing that this is the only 'natural' order. Using these three dimensions interchangeably to understand the gender order, the first part of the literature review will focus on power, labour, and cathexis.

The Gender Order and Power

The patriarchy is a socially structured system that reduces males and females to the functioning of their bodies. When men and women are reduced to their physical capacity, women are deemed to be the weaker sex. Within the confines of the patriarchy women are limited to the roles of motherhood and domestic servitude. Men are free to undertake all other roles outside of the home. This creates the gender order

that historically led to male domination over women (Connell 2005). The patriarchy is defined by French historian, Ivan Jablonka as:

...A system in which the masculine embodies both the superior and the universal, to the benefit of the majority of men and the minority of women...
(Jablonka: 2022: 72)

According to R.W. Connell (2005), within the gender order there are four types of masculinity. The dominant and powerful type is hegemonic masculinity, and the other types are divergent masculinities. The sociological term hegemony was used by Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci when referring to power relations, control, and consensus within society (Fusaro 2018). Hegemony is a consensual, cultural, dominance of one group over another which is legitimised by social norms and practices. Hegemonic masculinity exists where the dominant 'ideal' males remain in power. In western countries according to Connell (2005) the hegemonic males are middle aged white men. This is still the case in some institutional settings in contemporary Ireland, most notably in government parties and the church.

Connell (2005) proposed that hegemonic masculinity oppresses the three non-hegemonic types along with all women. The non-hegemonic types are subordinate, marginalised, and complicit masculinity. The subordinate masculinity type relates to men deemed to be effeminate. This includes caring, emotional, and homosexual males. Marginal masculinity as the name suggests, refers to men belonging to marginalised groups in society. This may relate to their skin colour, migrant status or any disabilities that prevent them from fitting the cultural 'hegemonic ideal.' Complicit masculinity relates to males who do not challenge the patriarchy ideals. The views and beliefs of these men may or may not be hegemonic, or dominant. They do not

challenge the gender order as it rewards them with 'patriarchal dividends' of prestige and esteem (Connell 2005). In the gender order the masculine identity automatically entitles men to an elevated status. Ultimately, the more masculine a man is the higher his status, any indication of femininity demotes his status. If the gender order was on a continuum, hegemonic masculine men are at one end and female women are at the other end. This theory has been criticized by many authors including Anthony Giddens and Philip Sutton (2013) for not offering a counter argument to hegemonic masculinity.

“Unless we know what actions would challenge it, how can we know what actions constitute hegemonic masculinity in the first place?” (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 642)

Giddens and Sutton (2013) further argue that without a counter masculinity type, the theory does not explain why some modern men embrace the role of 'house husband'. Furthermore, some men appreciate that women can now bring a wage into the family home.

The New Labour Economy

Sylvia Walby (1990) proposed that there are six structures of gender inequality. These are paid work, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, and the State. She argued that discrimination in these structures followed women from the home as they entered the work environment. Over thirty years later, Jablonka (2022: 201) argues that modern workplaces have not been reshaped equitably to suit women and conventional norms still exist. Many women are expected to carry out their work alongside their domestic duties. The freedom from domestic duties allows men to commit themselves more to their work. This leads to the perception that male workers are more valuable.

...This can lead to hypogamy, meaning the woman's job is less demanding and less lucrative than the man's... (Jablonka 2022: 201)

Moreover, Anne O'Brien (2020) argues that although employers offer equality for women to access jobs, the workplace is not always redesigned to suit women. She argues that in some industries women are assimilated into male dominated cultures. This gives the men working in these jobs an unspoken advantage. Apple (2010) argues that where women enter traditionally male dominated fields the pay and conditions associated with that role begin to deteriorate. According to Williams, and Neely (2001: 165) as the conditions are reduced in many fields of work, the work-sphere becomes more precarious for everyone. As work-life becomes more precarious men and women are forced to work more hours to make ends meet. In the modern economy if a couple decide it is easier for one parent to stay at home, it is most likely to be the woman who makes the sacrifice. There is more flexibility given to women and the men may add more financial value to the household income.

According to Wright (2015) the notion that women are being empowered in the workplace and men are being disempowered is a myth. This myth acts as an invisible barrier for gender equality. Furthermore, she argues that men are less likely to fear their loss of the patriarchal dividend when retrograde, stereo-typical notions of masculinity are re-enforced in modern culture.

.... 'the masculine mystique encourages men to neglect their own self-improvement on the assumption that sooner or later they will be rewarded for their manliness'... (Wright 2015: 123)

Masculinity and The Body

Walby (1990) set out that a key marker of masculine domination is the objectification of the female body as a possession of the dominating males.

...the eroticization of dominance and subordination creates gender as we know it... (1990: 118)

The differentiation of men and women based on their biology is a biological reductionist view that is central to the legitimisation of the patriarchy. Connell (2005: 46) argues that many biological studies are skewed. The ideas that 'men are hard wired to hunt' or 'men are genetically programmed for aggression' according to Connell (2005) are based on unquestioned, non-critical, assumptions. These assumptions are metaphors and tropes that have been carried down through the ages. Connell (2005) uses the example of the apparent inability of women to parallel park a car. There is an unquestioned assumed metaphor that the female brain is wired differently to the male brain. This allows us to believe that there is a biological influence over certain tasks, yet many of these arguments have not been proven (2005:47). Metaphors and tropes are used in advertising all the time according to Jacobsen (2004) for instance; 'food is fuel for the body'. The notion that the body must be refuelled may create a foundation for numerous studies. Connell (2005) argues that there is a tendency to believe these metaphors and biological studies as they are considered rational and scientific. She argues that in cases where social arguments for gender are no longer relevant, the gap is filled by making the argument for biology. One aspect traditionally associated with the masculine identity is strength and the male body. This goes in tandem with the concept that men are biologically hardwired to be hunters. According to Jablonka (2022: 49) the role of men as hunters originated with the patriarchal circle in the stone age. The circle was designed with the intention that

men would hunt the food and act as protectors of women as they tended to motherhood duties. Jablonka (2022: 56) sets out that throughout the generation's masculinity, manhood, and virility, have all been depicted and passed down through visuals, books, images, and statues. The characteristics have consistently depicted masculine men as muscley, sporting facial hair and in later years riding horses. The images also depicted men as hunters and meat-eaters

Masculinity and Gender

According to Michael Kimmel (1997) masculinity means different things to different men, depending on their cultural beliefs. Hegemonic masculinity is associated with strength, success, competency, reliability, and authoritative power, particularly over women and marginalised classes. According to Sumpter (2015) 'fitting in' and 'being better than other guys is the key to acceptance' for men. Kimmel (1997) suggests that 'Manhood' is a treasure that is passed down from one generation to the next. He argues that men have agency to collectively change the ideals of masculinity. According to the author this means that masculinity can be reconceptualised by changing the rhetoric and questioning ourselves when we say, 'boys will be boys' and 'oh it's just human nature.' He argues that it is important for masculinity to recognise and appreciate the differences both within masculinity and between the masculine and feminine.

Judith Butler (1990) argues that we should not be basing theories on the differences between the genders. In her book 'Gender Trouble' the author argues that sex and gender are not the same thing. She critiqued many theories, including feminist theories for legitimising patriarchal ideals and using unquestioned gendered assumptions. Her theory proposed that gender is a patriarchal construct and something we perform in a

theatrical manner. These concepts of 'doing gender' or performing our gender have strong parallels with Ervin Goffman's (1959) symbolic interactional theory. Goffman proposed that we are not subject to our social structure, we have agency within society. In using our own agency, we present and represent ourselves through performances with one another. Furthermore, by taking Butler's argument into account there is a suggestion that differentiating based on gender limits the scope for agency and equality between the sexes.

Masculinity in Ireland

According to Giddens and Sutton (2013) sociological research only began to focus on men and their relation to the modern gender order in the 1980's. However, according to Clay Darcy (2019) the focus on men in Ireland is still relatively unexplored. The author argues that the masculine identity in Ireland is unique and complex. According to the author, in the era of colonialism, the British referred to all Irish men and women as feminine and weak. He suggests that this may have led some Irish men to overcompensate and overinvest in their masculine identity. Furthermore, the traditional gender roles later instilled by religiosity and the 'breadwinner' model have conflated a stereotypical masculine identity in Ireland. In recent generations the expectation of Irish men was to work hard and drink alcohol. However, this was not the lived experience of men according to Darcy (2019). The study found that Irish men had complex, unique, and ambiguous understandings of masculinity. The varying understandings depend on individual upbringing, geographical location, family relations and socioeconomic conditions. The author noted that although there was a high degree of ambiguity, some men found new ways to express a more fluid, contemporary, masculine identity.

... Some of the participants in this study acknowledged that there is a greater degree of self-determination in how to express masculinity in contemporary Ireland.... (2019:30)

Debbie Ging (2005) argues that many individuals define their identity through the dominant media culture. A phenomenon that emerged in Britain and Ireland in the early 1990's and lasted right through to the mid 2000's was the male 'Lad Culture'. This subculture attempted to discredit the second wave feminist movement. Lad Culture emerged alongside 'Britpop music' and men's magazines and served to re-enforce some of the misogynistic behaviour associated with hegemonic masculinity. The subculture became quite dominant in many anglophone countries. It promoted strict heterosexuality, homosocial activities, aggressive behaviour, ironic sexism, and heavy drinking. The caveat according to Ging (2005) was that it was all in jest and 'tongue in cheek'. If this behaviour was contested, the individual was said to have 'no sense of humour.' She argues that the phenomenon became less popular with the younger generation as men's magazines died out and the internet took over. She also suggested that younger men are more inclined to view women as their equals and 'Lad Culture' was not something they were familiar with. Considering the argument that our identities are shaped by the dominant media, the identity of many men growing up in this era may have been formed through this culture.

According to Anne Cleary (2005) the persistent media driven notion in contemporary Ireland that masculinity is in 'crisis', is not the reality for many men. The author suggests that discourses relating to young male suicide and challenges for men in the workplace and school are not specific to all men.

...In popular terms the lives of these men have become linked to the general grouping of men - all supposedly caught up in the crisis of male identity... (2005: 7)

Masculinity and Food Practices

The first part of the review focused on the gender order and the relation to power, labour, and the masculine identity. This next section will apply food to the main themes of gender, the masculine identity, and meat consumption. According to Rebecca Swenson (2009: 39) contemporary cooking culture reproduces gender norms by using different rhetoric's. The author suggests that cookbooks for men are based on 'caveman-like' activities such as barbequing meat and cooking it over an open fire. Moreover, they are more likely to portray cooking as a hobby and a fun task when carried out by men. Whereas female targeted cookbooks consist of cheap, economical meals for the family and time saving recipes. She argues that where the media once portrayed the kitchen as 'no place for men,' today they promote it is a place of leisure for men.

...to protect the concept of masculinity, men enter the kitchen as scientists, chefs, athletes, and entertainers'.... (2009: 50)

She also argues that the portrayal of men in this way protects the masculine identity against the perception that men may be caring and nurturing to their family.

According to many papers on food practices including Lax and Mertig (2020) protein rich food, particularly meat was historically saved for men. Non-hegemonic males and those of lower class were given priority over all women. Furthermore, Sumpter (2015) argues that the consumption of meat was historically used to discriminate against women, children, and peasants. Traditionally across many cultures the hunting of

animals and consumption of the meat was a homosocial activity. The subsequent exclusion of women, children, and peasants from these activities symbolised patriarchal power.

Laura Wright (2015) explores the cultural identity associated with masculinity and meat by analysing meat advertisements aimed at men. The author suggested that contemporary advertisements depicting men eating meat in barbeque settings aim to instil that meat eating is a natural homosocial activity. She argues that contemporary advertisements aim to instil and re-enforce these beliefs. One advertisement by 'Burger King' aimed at men, promoted objectification of women by showing seductive images of women eating meat.

...commercials bolster male insecurities about a mythological crisis of masculinity that can be solved by erasing women from the picture (by featuring the act of meat eating as a homosocial activity) or by sexualizing them, turning them into consumable objects by conflating them with meat... (2015: 115)

Male Vegetarian Trends

As set out by Boyle (2011:321) vegetarianism has a wide vocabulary of motives and various explanations that may be unique to an individual. The choice to become vegetarian in a meat dominated western culture is considered as deviant, regardless of positive intentions. He sets out that many vegetarians make up for this deviance by eating meat replacements. The consumption of veggie burgers and other replacements offer vegetarians a sense of normalcy in their diet. Referring to another study Sumpter (2015: 111) set out that men are more likely to use these mock meats at barbeques and various homosocial events. This gains them acceptance in

hegemonic situations. According to Boyle (2011) the decision to become vegetarian is a choice that breaks through social norms.

...vegetarianism becomes a complex, individualised, and even political lifestyle choice that reveals extremely personal feelings and beliefs in which many who practice the dietary pattern may feel both liberated and marginalised... (Boyle 2011:331)

In another study Modlinska et al. (2020) reported vast differences in attitudes toward meat consumption between men and women. The study found that men were more likely to conform to traditional gender roles than women. Men were also unlikely to deviate from traditional norms of meat eating and become vegetarian. The study suggested that in cases where men became vegetarian, they had different motivations to women. Modlinska et al. (2020) reported that men were more likely to abstain from meat for health-based reasons, particularly concerning muscle and body fat. Lax and Mertig (2020) also reported that it is less common for men to feel emotional guilt when consuming meat than women. Modlinska et al. (2020) reported that meat eaters were less likely to care about bodyweight or image. One observation in relation to courting and attractiveness suggested that men who ate beef were deemed more masculine. Conversely women who ate beef were deemed less feminine. A striking finding from the research was the social effects of meat abstinence on vegetarian men:

...It can be concluded that male vegetarians may have greater psychological problems related to their vegetarianism, resulting from greater social rejection and exclusion, as they fail to meet the socially accepted standards... (2020: 17)

There are no vegetarian studies to draw from in the Irish context relating to meat and masculinity. A quantitative vegetarian study carried out by the Economic and Social

Review Institution (ESRI, 2011: 423) used a wide range of socioeconomic variables including household income. Surprisingly, there was no differentiation between men and women. The findings suggested that in Ireland as adults reach the age of thirty, they are more likely to become more conscious of their health and the environment. As a result, they are likely to make some dietary changes, including choosing a vegetarian lifestyle. Another interesting finding was that co-habiting couples were more likely to practice vegetarianism together than couples who were married. The report also found that vegetarianism was more prevalent in individuals working from home. The authors suggest in the discussion that those practising vegetarianism may be more inclined to choose a lifestyle away from big corporations, institutions, and government departments.

2.3: Literature Review Conclusion

The literature review informed us that in many cases the gender order oppresses men and women. Although we no longer live in a strict patriarchal society, the gender order may be reproduced to an extent in some areas such as the labour market. Where patriarchal ideals have been undermined regarding the social structure of gender, the biological differences are then used to explain the necessity for the gender order. The masculine identity is not static, it is malleable and can be reconceptualised using agency. The media create a barrier to gender equality by portraying men as carefree, in some instances objectifying women, and promoting meat-eating as 'manly.' The understanding of masculinity in Ireland is ambiguous. In the few studies carried out on men the authors suggest that the lived experience for men differs to the experience portrayed in popular discourse. This may be attributed to the fact that there is a lack

of social research in the field. Vegetarianism is more common in women; men are more likely to experience social stigma if they abstain from meat. There are no studies in Ireland specific to masculinity and meat. It is unclear if men in contemporary society are embracing gender equality or holding tight to the patriarchal dividend. The next section of this project will seek to answer some of these questions by conducting a qualitative study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Foreword on definitions

The participants in this project are cisgender. This term refers to an individual who identifies their gender with their biological sex (Vivanco 2018). Millennials include anyone born between the years 1981 and 1996 (Dimock 2019). Meat eating practices are on a continuum, with carnivorous at one end and vegan at the other end (Boyle 2011). For ease of reference this research project, will only differentiate between two categories: non vegetarians and vegetarians. The dependant variable in the research question is the changing conceptualisations of masculinity and the independent variable is vegetarianism.

The overarching research question is ‘To what extent does male vegetarianism in Ireland challenge traditional notions of the masculine identity?’

Vegetarianism is increasing in Ireland (Leahy et al. 2011). Studies on meat and masculinity have suggested there is a perception in society that eating meat is ‘manly.’ Moreover, meat abstinence in males can lead to social stigma (Modlinska et. al. 2020). Bringing these points together this study will seek to explore the changing conceptualisations of masculinity using vegetarianism as a marker of agency and identity. Furthermore, the research will seek to explore if traditional values indicate a resistance to the changing notions of masculinity.

3:1 Research Method and Sampling

Given that the reasons to abstain from meat are so diverse quantitative methods for this project would be restrictive. A quantitative method would require a set of pre-categorised questions. One quantitative study used the MOM scale by asking participants to agree or disagree with the following statement: 'a real man wouldn't turn down a juicy steak' (Lax and Mertig 2020). This fails to recognise that some vegetarians enjoy meat yet may abstain for other reasons. There are very few qualitative research studies available on masculinity and vegetarianism (Oliver 2020). As mentioned in the literature review, there are very few studies carried out in Ireland on vegetarianism. Moreover, there are no studies carried out in Ireland on masculinity and meat consumption or vegetarianism. As this project is preliminary in nature the qualitative method is more useful to open the conversation.

This project will use a qualitative approach known as 'Grounded Theory.' This is a qualitative research method which was introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. Grounded theory is a systematic review of the data collected, in this case interviews, which are constantly compared to develop a theory based on emerging patterns, and themes (Bryman 2016: 385). The participant selection was purposive and used snowball sampling. The participants were purposively chosen based on their demography, in this case, millennials, cisgender and Irish. Millennials were chosen as they are a liminal age group, they experienced the transition from traditional roles toward gender equality. They were also selected based on their meat-eating patterns. The participants were asked if they had any peers that would be interested in participating, with one participant referring me to his friend. This method of sampling is known as snowball sampling (Bryman 2016: 424).

3.2 Gathering the Data

The data was gathered by carrying out eight one-hour, semi-structured interviews. Within the interviews the participants were separated into two categories of four: vegetarian and non-vegetarian. This created a comparative research approach. Based on the early research there was a set of questions developed. These questions were based on three themes that were central to the project. These themes are gender roles, masculine identity, and meat consumption. Appendix 1, attached to this project includes one transcribed interview. Appendix 2 includes a mind map designed in the early stages of the project to develop these themes.

Three of the participants were interviewed in person and the remaining five were interviewed online. The participants provided verbal consent at the beginning of each interview. The interviews were recorded using the app 'Otter,' this application uses artificial intelligence to transcribe the interviews. While it was useful, the transcriptions were unclear, I had to return to my field notes and the recordings to clarify much of the interviews.

An unintended consequence of asking men to discuss masculinity was that the participants spoke at great length. As a result, many of the interviews lasted up to 80 minutes. For many of the interviews it was not necessary to ask all the prepared questions as they were covered in the responses. While it was important to allow the participants to speak openly and freely, it was equally as important to bring the interviews back to the main research themes.

3.3 Challenges for the Research

I had some concerns early on regarding the interviews. As a cisgender female researcher, I was conscientious about discussing masculinity with men. With no previous studies to go on, I was unsure if it would be well received. I did not want to make my participants feel uneasy. To control for this, I carried out two pilot interviews with male family members. The benefits were worthwhile as it helped narrow down the focus of my questions. The responses at this stage also gave me some direction for the research. I realised at this point that my greatest challenge was the framing of questions around masculinity. As masculinity is a changing concept and means different things to different men, I was not sure how to ask the questions (Darcy 2019). I decided to include a proxy question, which was 'can you think of any male role models in popular culture today?.' I realised early in the real interviews that this was particularly important. Even with this question the participants struggled to think of any male role models. Once I got them thinking about this I probed further and asked what qualities they appreciated in these men.

I had the same concerns around equality between genders. I did not want to ask the participants about their thoughts on the workplace as it may be controversial, intrusive, and personal. I used a proxy question by asking how men felt about women entering the field of sports, which was traditionally a male dominated area.

Another challenge I experienced was the amount of data I acquired from the interviews. The guidelines of the project suggested 8 hours of fieldwork. I had over ten hours of interviews to sift through. The data was quite rich as the participants were so frank. With a tight deadline on the project, I applied a further filter to the data. Based on the research questions, and the literature I had reviewed around the conceptualisations of masculinity I asked two questions when analysing the responses:

- 1) Does this response indicate a resistance to changing conceptualisations?
- 2) Does this response indicate an openness to changing conceptualisations?

This helped me to cut through the data and link it back to the literature with more freedom. Furthermore, I did not have to explain the rationale each time which made my findings more concise and succinct.

The Table below sets out some demographic information about the participants. There is no personal data included and I used pseudonyms to protect their identity.

	Vegetarian				Non-Vegetarian			
Name	Terry (1)	Alex (2)	Jim (3)	Paul (4)	Darren (5)	Dylan (6)	Keith (7)	Sean (8)
Age	37	26	38	40	37	40	38	36
Field of Work	Public Servant	Public Servant	Remote IT	Finance	Manual Labor	Freelance Media	Accountant	Retail
Special Interests	Psychology	Weighlifting	Home DIY	Music	Running	Yoga	Watch Sports	Music

Table 1: Participant demographics

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The participants were over 18 years of age. They all provided verbal consent before conducting the interviews, which meant I did not need to use a consent form. As per the Maynooth University guidelines the recorded interviews and any data collected was saved on an encrypted USB device, to protect the individual confidentiality. The recordings, transcriptions, and field notes will be deleted and destroyed upon submission of this project.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

4.1: Findings Introduction

As discussed in the methodology and the literature review the project was developed around the three main themes of gender, the masculine identity and meat consumption. For the layout of this section, the question will be introduced and explained, and the responses will then be discussed. Where applicable the responses may be split into two headings for clarity: non-vegetarian, and vegetarian responses. This is not applicable for every theme as it may not be relevant to the discussion. The first theme looked at gender which encapsulates traditional values, gender equality, and gender roles. The second section will review responses to the questions on the

concept of masculinity. The final section will review the relationship between meat (consumption or abstinence), and the masculine identity.

Gender Roles and Values

The participants were asked about the domestic experience growing up. Particularly if one or both parents cooked or carried out domestic duties.

Non-Vegetarian Responses:

In all cases the respondents' mothers carried out the domestic duties growing up. For all respondents, the mother stayed at home while the father worked. When asked about cooking roles today there was a similar pattern in the responses. Two of the participants do not cook for themselves as it is done for them by a woman. One of the participants does the cooking for his family as he is currently out of employment and his partner is working. He also reported that cooking is a hobby for him. One of the participants lives alone and does his own cooking. Three of the participants prefer women to do the cooking as women are perceived to be better cooks. One participant said he never had to learn about cooking as his mother used to do it and now his wife does it. Another participant suggested that men were not taught how to cook or were shamed if they tried.

... I don't know if you noticed this. It wouldn't be that fellas didn't want to cook it was like, oh no, don't even try. Everyone will laugh. Even on the Oxo Ad, the dad messes up the dinner... (Sean, 36)

Vegetarian Responses:

Two of the vegetarian participants had the same experience as the non-vegetarians growing up. However, two of them stated that the roles were split evenly between their

parents, even though both parents worked. The four participants responded that they do their own cooking today. Two of the participants said they cook separately to their wives as their wives are not vegetarian. The youngest vegetarian participant indicated that a man cooking is seen as attractive these days.

...If a man can cook it's desirable, he is seen as competent, instead of having to rely on someone to do it for them... (Alex, 26)

There are differences between the two groups in relation to cooking. The non-vegetarians do not question the traditional roles that they were brought up with. One of the non-vegetarians made a point of saying that cooking is a hobby. Swensen (2009) made this point on cooking culture in the literature review. When men cook it is not depicted as a chore, it is a hobby. Where, two of the vegetarians were exposed to shared duties, they reproduced this in their adult lives. Moreover, two of the participants deviated from traditional gender norms completely, as their wives are not vegetarian. One of the vegetarians' associates cooking with masculine traits by adding that it demonstrates competency (Kimmel 1997). In response to this question the vegetarians appear to be more open to the changing conceptualisations of the masculine identity than the non-vegetarians.

Moving on from the domestic roles, within the theme of gender, the participants were then asked about women in sport. As mentioned in the methodology section, sport (a traditionally male dominated area) was chosen instead of the workplace, to ensure the question was not too personal. All the participants responded that they think women should be treated better in this area and would like to see more televised women's sport. One non-vegetarian participant suggested that women will never get equal pay in sport as they are not physically as strong as men, and it does not generate enough

revenue. He made the point that he did not necessarily think that this was fair or just, it is just the way it is. One of the vegetarian participants responded that he would love his daughters to grow up involved in sports, he thinks it would be great for them. There were no major differences in this response between the two groups on this question. Although the non-vegetarian mentioned a barrier that would prevent equality between men and women in sport. The vegetarian did not mention any barriers and is hopeful for future generations of women. The unanimous response was interesting if we consider that women in sports apparently pose no threat to the masculine identity, based on their strength.

When the question about sport was brought up two of the non-vegetarian participants brought up jobs in the sports and media industry. Both participants complained that they thought it was unfair that men in sport and media were losing jobs and being replaced by women, due to positive discrimination. One participant who works in media stated that it is all women today in the big roles and it was impossible for men to get anywhere. The perception of these participants does not take into consideration O'Brien's (2020) point in the literature review, that women find themselves assimilated into male dominated cultures. These responses from the non-vegetarians may suggest that they feel challenged by gender equality in the workspace.

Masculinity

In relation to masculinity the participants were asked about the importance of strength to men. The eight participants said it is extremely important to men, although there was a hesitance to admit this in some responses. One non-vegetarian responded that strength is important to protect the family.

...well, I suppose in modern society, you could argue that you don't particularly need physical strength for men or women. But I suppose in general men are there to protect the family a little bit, physically, or their partners. So, I guess in that sense, yes... (Darren, 37)

Whereas one of the vegetarians responded that strength is more important among men as opposed to between men and women.

...being perceived as physically strong, is extremely socially valuable to men, extremely socially valuable. Whether they admit it or not. Being physically strong has a currency amongst men. Anyone who argues that is full of it. It's just like it's unspoken, it's an unspoken social currency... (Terry, 37)

In this case the non-vegetarian is more likely to attach traditional gendered values to the importance of strength and masculinity. The vegetarian is more likely to associate it with his status in relation to other men. This may suggest that the vegetarian is more comfortable with the changing nature of masculinity and using his agency he finds new ways to express this. As Sumpter (2015) suggested a key feature of masculinity is that men want acceptance from other men. The non-vegetarian appears to be less secure with the changing notions of masculinity as he still associates his strength with 'protecting' his family.

When asked 'who they would identify as a good role model for men in popular culture' most of the participants struggled to think of anyone. This question was used to get the participants thinking about the masculine identity. Two participants (one vegetarian, one non-vegetarian) said there was no men they could think of in the public sphere that demonstrated good qualities traditionally associated with the masculine identity. Two participants (one vegetarian, one non-vegetarian) suggested that there

were men they appreciated but not because of their masculinity. One non-vegetarian participant suggested that his understanding of good being a 'good man' came through music. He suggested that the bands he listened to promoted gender equality and changed his perception of misogynistic views for the better. One of the vegetarian participants said there was nobody in the public sphere just men in his life that he looked up to that behaved a certain way.

...A man who is comfortable in his own skin, they're not afraid to be themselves. They don't get jealous or feel challenged. Whereas a man that let's say is maybe not happy or as comfortable in his own skin wants to feel superior to other men. He wants to bring men up to his level instead of trying to feel superior by belittling them... (Alex, 26)

In contrast one of the non-vegetarian participants suggested that a good role model was Jordan Peterson. *(He is a popular psychologist with conservative views on gender roles)*

.... Jordan Peterson he is conservative. I don't believe in everything he says. You know, he is flawed in certain areas.... Like there is no feminine in him whatsoever.... but he is driving people to be better versions of themselves... (Dylan, 40)

The interviews suggested that there was no consensus on masculinity between the participants. Again, as Kimmel (1997) suggested the perception differs from person to person. Furthermore, there was ambiguity with all the participants around the notions of masculinity which is consistent with Darcy's (2019) point on ambiguity and Irish masculinity. One thing that is comparative between the two quotes above is that the vegetarian appears to be more open to modern notions of masculinity. His response

suggests that superiority, traditionally associated with the patriarchy is not a good quality in men. The non-vegetarian response is not completely traditional; however, he still appreciates the ideals of traditional gender roles which may suggest a resistant to changing notions of masculinity.

Vegetarianism and the Masculine Identity

When asked if they think meat is associated with masculinity all respondents agreed. They were then asked why they think they are associated. There were similar responses with all the participants. One vegetarian respondent believed it was to do with animalistic perceptions.

Vegetarian Responses:

*...I think, now this is weird, but I think a lot of lads think that they are lions. The way a lion hunts and eats meat. I think they would see themselves that way...
(Jim, 38)*

Another response from a vegetarian participant was that meat and masculinity is primordial.

...I'm basically vegan right, love animals, but the idea of the hunt appeals to me. If I hunted down an animal, I would eat the meat. It's programmed into me. It's like the person who scores on the football team. (Terry, 37)

Non-Vegetarian Responses:

One of the non-vegetarian participants said he loves meat, particularly red meat.

'Oh yeah, I would eat red meat a lot. I love a good burger, a good steak, sausages, rashers, the lot. Me mates would as well. None of me mates would be vegan or vegetarian or anything like that... (Keith, 38)

Another non-vegetarian responded that when lads get together there is a perception that they should eat meat.

I went to a restaurant recently and ordered my burger medium rare. The next day I was so sick and thinking why did I do that? But it was because the lads were out we said oh we should all get burgers... (Sean, 36)

This suggests that there is a perception that eating meat is a 'manly' thing to do. The non-vegetarian participants were less likely to question the association between meat and masculinity. This may indicate cognitive dissonance; they are happy to eat meat without thinking about the consequences. Jacobsen (2004) referred to this as 'de-animalizing', where we see meat in packaging in shops and don't think any deeper about how it got there.

In comparison the vegetarians were more reflective in their responses. They really thought about the question and related it back to idea of the hunter gatherer and cavemen. Their responses suggested that there is an instilled perception that men are natural hunters, which relates back to the patriarchal circle (Jablonka 2022). Furthermore, Sumpter (2015), Lax and Mertig (2020) Wright (2015) and Swensen (2009) all refer to the beliefs men have around hunting, caveman like activities, and masculine power. In this response the vegetarians are more reflective, they are aware that there is a traditional association with masculinity, yet they choose not to eat meat.

The respondents were also asked if they had experienced or could imagine men experiencing criticism if they chose to be vegetarian. Most of the respondents were

unanimous in saying that 'a bit of slagging' is to be expected between men. This section will include of the responses as they reveal a lot about the attitudes and representation of men outside of the scope of the interviews.

Non-Vegetarian Responses:

*...You'd want to rip the p*ss out of them. But you don't want to hurt them either, like they're your mates. But with that said you can't say anything these days, about anything, everything is too sanitised. I would imagine though that vegetarian's look down their noses at meat eaters, but we wouldn't care that they just eat nettles and weeds... (Keith,38)*

.... it's not a thing for me. If someone said like, oh we're coming over, but oh by the way we don't eat meat I'd say cool and make them a vegetarian curry. I wouldn't ask because I don't care. But I think guys might get a hard time from other guys, before women.... (Darren, 37)

...Yeah like if I'm at home I don't cook meat. If I was out in a group setting I'd eat meat, because it's just easier than the hassle... (Dylan, 40)

...Yeah some lads are still like that. It would just be like what are you eating...is that rabbit food?...loads of men still say that.... even my dad... (Sean, 36)

Vegetarian Responses:

...I was brought up vegetarian, but I know some guys who wouldn't even consider it because it doesn't seem masculine. But I find the guys that do ask me about it are more open minded, tend to be the guys who are more comfortable in themselves...more confident and care less about social stigma. And if anything, that is more masculine in my eyes... (Alex, 26)

...Ah lads wouldn't care really. If I was at a barbeque they would probably hand me an empty burger bun and laugh, but they wouldn't care... (Paul, 40)

...oh yeah it still shocks people that I am vegetarian. I just laugh it off, people say oh vegetables are rabbit food. They will be telling me all the facts about iron and protein, that's usually men the more macho, traditional ones.... (Jim, 38)

.... I haven't experienced it no. I imagine some do. But like, I am a real man's man ya know, I'm not bragging but I am strong and very comfortable in my masculinity. So, I don't think anyone would try and argue or mess with me on that, ya know. But it's ok if it's a bit of slagging, like that's just a mutual respect thing between men.... (Terry, 37)

The non-vegetarians were less reflective in their responses. Moreover, being 'slagged by other lads may suggest that there is a stigma associated with male vegetarianism. Sumpter (2015) suggested that acceptance is important to men. The study carried out by Modlinksa et al. (2020) also suggested that men were unlikely to deviate from traditional norms for fear of social stigma. This is further highlighted with one participant suggesting that he only eats meat when he is in homosocial settings. In comparison the vegetarians do expect to receive some criticism, for their choice to deviate, but it does not affect their self-esteem.

Changing Notions of Masculinity

In relation to changing notions of masculinity the participants were asked do they think the ideals have changed over the years. They were also asked what changes they have observed.

Non-Vegetarian Responses:

...It's a difficult one. I think back in the day you were like, strong and maybe you ate meat. And then I think as the generations have gone on masculinity is less about what you can do and more about the fact that you are biologically a man. And now that's changed because obviously you have gender fluidity. So, I guess in modern society masculinity is not a thing anymore. People are less masculine and more feminine. It's just not a thing. I do think defined gender roles are a good thing though.... (Darren, 37)

...It depends on the perception of what you think is masculine. The perception now, it's not mine, but now people think you must be in touch with your feminine side. It wouldn't be my cup of tea. I think there is a lot of censoring now, particularly with celebrities. They might not have misogynistic views, but they have to be careful... (Keith, 37)

...There is a lot of female aggression towards men. You know this idea that men have to submit and become just ya know...women...as Jordan Petersons says, he worries for the future. I think a lot of men are just bloody lost to be honest. There is a lot of confusion in the world. It was easier when we were sticking to genders. Men don't know what's toxic or not these days... (Dylan, 40)

Vegetarian Responses:

...Ya know, with masculinity there's features of it that change. It can be made up in other ways ya know. Like men often talk about emotional stuff at the gym. It's this weird thing. Like...this dude would wait till he is lifting weights and then he starts talking about his problems. It's like the masculine equation, you balance your masculinity out... (Terry, 37)

*...Yeah I think guys talk more about their emotions. It's ok to be soft now and talk about your relationship problems. Then if a guy is quiet, that's when you worry. But the younger generation are taking the p***. They've gone too far; they want to talk about everything. It's like all the oppression over the years. They need a filter sometimes... (Paul, 40)*

There are differences between the two groups in response to this question. The non-vegetarians have indicated that becoming 'more feminine' is a challenge to their identity. One of the participants suggested that masculinity does not exist anymore, as men become more feminine. Moreover, one non-vegetarian indicated that there is a lot of censoring, and 'you can't have a laugh anymore' in social settings. This may align with the 'Lad Culture' ideals that it is ok to make comments if they were 'tongue in cheek' (Ging 2005.) In contrast, the non-vegetarians were more comfortable with re-negotiating their masculine identity and balancing it out, without taking it 'too far.'

Vegetarianism and Motivations

The vegetarian participants were asked about their reasons for abstaining from meat. As Boyle (2011) set out the choice to abstain from meat was deeply personal and had a broad range of reasons. The youngest participant responded that he was brought up by his parents to be a vegetarian. This had forced him to reflect on vegetarianism throughout his entire life. He concluded that he thought factory farming and killing animals was emasculating and it was more masculine to abstain. Another participant also felt that factory farming was incredibly emasculating and the damage to the earth was non-sensical. He associated his vegetarianism with masculinity as he felt it demonstrated good masculine qualities such as willpower, rationality, and respect. One participant stopped eating meat when he moved in with his vegetarian girlfriend.

For him, he really enjoyed the food she cooked and once he stopped eating meat it allowed him to reflect on the damage caused by eating meat. The fourth participant in this category had wanted to become vegetarian for many years as he never felt comfortable with animal cruelty. He had begun to question meat eating in his twenties and when he got to his thirties he made the decision to quit. Three of the vegetarians had quit in their thirties which is consistent with the findings in the ESRI (2011) review on adult vegetarianism in Ireland.

The non-vegetarian participants were not asked this question, however three of them indicated that they do not eat meat all the time. One participant has recently moved home with his parents and his dinner is made by his mother. Most of his friends are vegetarian and vegan. He stated that when he has his own place it is unlikely that he will eat meat. A second participant had tried vegetarianism after watching a lot of Netflix documentaries. He suggested that it was too difficult to get nutrients without meat and returned to eating meat. The third participant made a similar point that he goes between vegetarianism and meat eating. He finds it difficult to find suitable alternatives and would choose meat in the company of others as he would not like to be 'awkward.' Some of these points are consistent with Boyle's (2011) argument that many new vegetarians struggle to find nutritional replacements.

4.2: Conclusion and Summary of Findings

On the theme of gender roles specifically cooking, where both parents cooked growing up, this was reproduced in their adult lives. The non-vegetarians reported that they never had to learn. The vegetarians were more likely to cook for themselves even where they were in relationships, with partners who were not vegetarian. There was

an openness to women participating in sport. However, two non-vegetarians indicated that there was a threat in relation to jobs in the field. In this section there is a suggestion that the vegetarians are open to the changing conceptualisation of masculinity, the non-vegetarians appeared more attached to traditional ideals.

On the theme of masculinity, strength is very important to men, for different reasons, that may not relate to their masculine identity. The most interesting finding was that the participants could not think of any good role models who demonstrated good masculine qualities. There are many reasons for this, but perhaps one reason is that the understanding of masculinity in Ireland is ambiguous. Another reason might be as one participant suggested that masculinity doesn't exist anymore in popular culture.

On vegetarianism and meat consumption all the participants agreed that these are associated with the masculine identity. All the participants expect to get some criticism or light-hearted joking from other men about the choice to be vegetarian. This suggests that this is just the culture among Irish men. Nonetheless, it appears the choice to be vegetarian as a man requires a good level of self-esteem. Two of the vegetarians appeared to re-negotiate their masculine identity through their abstinence from meat.

This page is intentionally blank.

Chapter 5: Research Project Conclusion

This was an exceedingly small study on an area that has received little or no attention in the Irish context. As there were only eight participants in this study it is not possible to predict any trends or patterns from the data. This qualitative research served as a preliminary study. It served to kick off and up a conversation about the changing conceptualisations of masculinity in modern Ireland using vegetarianism as the tool to measure this. As a result, the conclusion for this project is tentative and preliminary.

The project set out to answer one main question and two sub-questions.

To what extent does male vegetarianism challenge traditional notions of the masculine identity in Ireland?

The literature suggested that vegetarianism may challenge traditional notions of masculinity. Moreover, by portraying meat consumption as masculine, this may be feeding into stereotypical gender norms based on the ideals that men are strong and hunt animals. Feeding into stereotypical gender norms, has two outcomes. It bolsters the masculine identity as powerful and allays any fears that men may lose their 'patriarchal dividend.' It also re-produces gender and instils a belief that the gender

order is natural. The interview responses suggested that there is a perception that meat is 'manly' in Ireland with participants relating it to 'hunting.' The choice to abstain is deviant and appears to diverge from traditional ideals.

1. Does male vegetarianism indicate an openness to the changing conceptualisations of masculinity?

Based on this exceedingly small sample, there are two potential answers to this question. Two of the participants did not associate masculinity with their esteem. They did not care if they got criticism for their deviant choice. The other two participants used the choice to be vegetarianism to re-negotiate their masculine identity. Overall, this indicates an openness to the changing conceptualisations of masculinity.

1. Do traditional values indicate a resistance to the changing conceptualisations of masculinity?

None of the vegetarians indicated any attachment to traditional values. This question only relates to the non-vegetarians. One non-vegetarian indicated that he is comfortable with the changing notions and hopes that masculinity will continue to evolve. The other three participants indicated a resistance with a few of their responses. Particularly where they believed that they prefer defined gender roles. This leads to a wider question that would warrant a bigger study and a lot more research. Why would they prefer defined gender roles? Are they holding on tight to their 'patriarchal dividend'?

5.1 Implications for Research

This exceedingly small research project is just opening the door into an entire area that is yet to be explored. Even with the limited time, resources, and data available in carrying out this project there were subtle indicators of ambiguity and divergences of masculinity within the participants responses. If this project was funded, with more time and resources it could contribute to the understanding of what it means to 'be a man in twenty first century Ireland.' The literature on Irish masculinity indicated that the lived experience for men was reportedly different to the perception of masculinity. Perhaps this is because there is not enough research to make any comparisons. There are many avenues this project could explore. Of-course it would be interesting to include the female perspective on vegetarianism, but this would take away from the necessity to understand the experience from a man's perspective. It would also be useful to look at geographical areas and compare rural to urban perspectives. Using vegetarianism as a tool is a useful way to probe and drill down into the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals. If this project were carried out on a larger scale it would be useful to employ a triangulation research method. This would involve using quantitative statistics to analyse emerging trends in male vegetarianism. This could inform a large-scale study of qualitative interviews. For now, it seems that masculinity is not necessarily in crises, it is just in flux.

Bibliography

Apple, Rima D. 2010. "How gender shaped science and education: A history of nutritional sciences in the 19th and 20th centuries". *Frontiers of Education in China* 5(2) 177-185. Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11516-010-0012-3>

Boyle, Joseph E. 2011. "Becoming Vegetarian: The Eating Patterns and Accounts of Newly Practicing Vegetarians." *Food and Foodways* 19(4). doi:

<https://doiorg.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1080/07409710.2011.630620>.

Bryman, Alan. 2016. *Social research methods*. 5th Ed. New York: Oxford University Press

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge

Cleary, Anne., Connell, R. W., Ging, D., Weeks, J., Hearn, J., Laoire, C. N., Lysaght, K., Corcoran, M. P., Lodge, A., Haywood, C., Popoviciu, L., Mac an Ghail, M., Kimmel, M., Traver, A., & O'Donoghue, D. 2005. Masculinities. *Irish journal of Sociology*: Pp. 5-252.14(2)

Connell, Raewyn. 1987. *Gender and power: society, the person, and sexual politics*. Blackwell: Polity Press.

Connell, Raewyn .2005. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Darcy, Clay J. 2019. "We Don't Really Give a Fiddlers About Anything: The Ambiguity, Contradiction and Fluidity of Irish Masculinities." *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies* 19(1). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.21427/aa58-qr67>

Dimock, Michael. 2019, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins". Retrieved 15/12/2021, (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>).

Fine-Davis, Margaret. 2015. *Gender roles in Ireland: Three decades of attitude change*. New York: Routledge. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315756165>

- Ging, Debbie. 2005. *A 'Manual on Masculinity'? The Consumption and Use of Mediated Images of Masculinity among Teenage Boys in Ireland*. London: SAGE Publications
- Giddens, Anthony, and Philip W. Sutton. 2013. *Sociology*. 7th Ed. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books
- Fusaro, Lorenzo. 2018. *Crises and hegemonic transitions: From Gramsci's Quaderni to the contemporary world economy*. Brill.
- Jablonka, Ivan. 2022. *A History of Masculinity: From Patriarchy to Gender Justice*. Translated by Nathan Bracher. Milton Keynes: Penguin Random House.
- Jacobsen, Evind. 2004. "The rhetoric of Food: food as nature, commodity and culture in M.S. Lien and B. Nerlich (eds) *The politics of food*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Kelly, Aidan. and Karen Ciclitira. 2011. "Eating and Drinking Habits of Young London-Based Irish Men: A Qualitative Study." *Journal of Gender Studies* 20(3):223-35. doi: 10.1080/09589236.2011.593322.
- Kimmel, Michael, S. 1997. Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity. Pp.223–242. In *Toward a new psychology of gender, edited by Mary M. Gergen and Sara. N. Davis*. Taylor & Frances/Routledge.
- Lax, Jacob B. and Angela G. Mertig. 2020. "The Perceived Masculinity of Meat: Development and Testing of a Measure across Social Class and Gender." *Food, culture, & society* 23(3):416-26. doi: 10.1080/15528014.2020.1741068.
- Leahy, Eimear., Lyons, Sean. and Richard S.J. Tol. 2011. "Determinants of Vegetarianism and Meat Consumption Frequency in Ireland." *The Economic and Social Review* 42(4):407-36.
- O'Brien, Anne. 2020. "Film, Television and Gendered Work in Ireland". In *Producing knowledge, reproducing gender: Power, production, and practice in contemporary Ireland*, edited by Mary P Corcoran and Pauline Cullen. Dublin University College Dublin Press.
- Sumpter, Kirsten. 2015. "Masculinity and Meat Consumption: An Analysis through the Theoretical Lens of Hegemonic Masculinity and Alternative Masculinity Theories." *Sociology Compass* 9(2). doi: <https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1111/soc4.12241>.
- Swenson, Rebecca. 2009. "Domestic Divo? Televised Treatments of Masculinity, Femininity and Food." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26(1):36-53. doi: 10.1080/15295030802684034.
- Walby, Sylvia. 1990. *Theorizing patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Williams, Christine L., and Megan Tobias Neely. 2018. "Gender Inequality and Feminism in the New Economy" Pp. 156-169 in *Gender Reckonings: New Social Theory and Research*, edited by Messerschmidt, James W., Messner, Michael., Connell, Raewyn., Martin, Patricia Yancey. New York: New York University Press.
- Wright, Laura. 2015. *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Vivanco, Luis A. 2018. "Cisgender." Oxford University Press.

Kennedy, Sinead. (2020) *The Right to Know: Gender, Power, Reproduction and Knowledge*. In: Cullen, P. & Corcoran, M.P. 2020, *Producing knowledge, reproducing gender: power, production, and practice in contemporary Ireland*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Tiernan, Sonja. 2020, *The history of marriage equality in Ireland: a social revolution begins*. 1st Ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Methodological Appendices

Appendix 1 – Transcribed Interview

Interview for transcribing (Sean, 36)

Interviewer

So, when you think about foods specifically cooking what comes to your mind?

Interviewee

Oh, hmmm...

Interviewer

Anything, anything at all...

Interviewee

Well, I'm notoriously a bad cook so mostly accidents to be honest.

Interviewer

Accidents?

Interviewee

Yeah, no, it goes back to especially for me when I was in Canada. I was just like just cooking just the worst. As long as it was cheap. I was cooking it. Like over there. That's what I think of...it was like stomach aches. That's what I associate it with. Foods that I don't eat anymore, because of like over in Canada, certain meats, and everything as well. So that will probably tie in nicely to what you are talking about.

Interviewer

So you were poisoning yourself? Cooking is not your thing?

Interviewee

Not really, I'll be more interested in doing it when I am in my own place. Yeah. It's not something that I really kind of get into, you know what I mean? Yeah. Like my brother was a bit more adventurous and tried stuff, you know, like different recipes that like once I'm kind of in my own space, I'll probably do that.

Interviewer

Yeah. So it's more of an environment thing. When you were in Canada you cooked for yourself but you said it wasn't good?

Interviewee

The worst, yeah the worst, I would just eat it. Out of just like... right... well I'm after spending the money and time on it. And then I'd make it like once or twice and it's like, oh, it's weird. I have this

like horrible stomach-ache every day, or every time I eat this, what's going on? And then I'd never put two and two together obviously it was terrible so that's you know, once bitten twice shy type of thing.

Interviewer

That's valid. We've established that cooking is not something you are drawn to. Maybe you're drawn to other things. For cooking would you think in your experience, it's associated with one gender more than the other?

Interviewee

Do you know what? There's two different perspectives on this, right. Obviously, there's the, you know, what's seen as the traditional but like, I say, all that stuff should be dead in my opinion, and it's just, these traditions should go, all that stuff should be just tossed aside like now. Like there's no need for it anymore. But like, so when you were younger, it was like, you know, you would hear stories from like, parents and dad's and everything being like, oh, yeah, well, look, I cook in the kitchen. I do all this, you know, and then the joke would be even like as it got later on. I don't know if you've noticed this. It wouldn't be that the fellas didn't want to cook it was like this. Oh, no, you're bad cooks don't even try. Don't even try. Everyone will laugh. Even on TV. It was like when I was a kid. It was like the Oxo ad, it was the man making the dinner and the dad screwing up everything. So it's like, those sorts of values. Where they were trying, they were like, I'd say more in our generation. They haven't been instilled on us which I think is a good thing. I think that kind of that entire, like, you know, the roles in the kitchen, like that and like just the roles in general like house care. Or like working. We're kind of the first generation to kind of be like, no, do you know none of that matters, none of that works.

Interviewer

Mmm. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewee

Yeah. I think about my twenties. A lot of the way I've been thinking changed, like I'd say, maybe ten years ago. Now and I just haven't looked back since. Sorry, that was a very long-winded answer.

Interviewer

Oh no, it's great. Like I really want you to go off into your thoughts about it and just, you know, say what you're thinking, that's brilliant. Em, that's very interesting, actually, I'd like to back to that point about our generation later in the interview.

Um, so thinking back to when you were over in Canada your social circle or groups of friends. Like would they be similar as well? Would any of your male friends be into cooking? Maybe if they were in relationships or anything like that, where one might do the cooking more than the other?

Interviewee

Yeah like one of my best friends over there, her husband was a chef, before he started playing in bands and stuff like that. He worked as a cook, or a chef. So, he would always bring us over and make food and then when I visited him a couple years ago, he was like oh, we've gone completely vegan now. I hope you don't mind. And I'm kind of, of the mindset where it's like whoever I'm out with, however they want to eat. Especially if I'm like a guest. I'll just go along with whatever they're getting. And I'd be like, just order something that you think I will like

Interviewer

That's a really good guest!

Interviewee

There's always like some sort of fake meat or something, but like they can't tell difference. A lot of my friends are like in the punk scene and stuff like that, which is a bit more kind of left leaning (politically). And say the friend group that I had before when I was younger, you know, they were kind of like, you know, those mates were like 'the laaaads,' (*joking says 'qwoar'*). So you wouldn't get that cooking with them.

Interviewer

So you find with different friend groups, maybe there are different ideals. Yeah, and were they Canadian or Irish? Just out of interest?

Interviewee

They're Canadian and Irish. Like that's the thing you will find with punk and the heavy metal scene. Nearly all of them either work in IT or as a chef. That's like the only two jobs you can do apparently. It's to do with the flexibility as well. You get time off if you work in a restaurant or anything like that, and it's like, hey, I need time off. For this. I need to go on tour. I need to do this. No, you can't. Okay, cool. I quit. Oh, why? Like, come back. Ya know.

Interviewer

Well, that's actually most of the questions for gender roles. I might ask one or two more later, but we'll see how we go.

So, moving on to masculinity...when it comes to how men think... do you think physical strength is important to men today?

Interviewee

(*Long pause*) I think.... I would like to say no, but I lift weights at home and everything. And I'd like to think I'm mature. But if someone said to me, say, if I have to move a milk crate at work and then they're like 'oooooh what's the matter you can't move it?' (*jocular voice*) Yeah, that would actually bother me. It would actually bother me a lot, being completely honest with you. Then I would say you do it and then they would, and I'd be like oh s*** sorry I can't, I've a bad back.

Interviewer

That's interesting so you said you'd like to say no, it doesn't matter, but it does.

Interviewee

Yeah so say if I was going out with a girl and she was like a lifter (*weights*) or whatever, and she was like, Oh, I can lift heavier stuff I'd be like yeah.... well done that's brilliant. Like help me lift this then. But if someone was like, oh, dude you can't lift that cos you're weak....I'd be like leave it out dude, I'm trying.

Interviewer

Haha, so going back to the 'girl' thing then. Do you think you would feel better if you were stronger

than the girl or would it matter?

Interviewee

It wouldn't matter (*pause*). Until like this. I sound so immature when I say this. It doesn't matter to me. And it wouldn't matter if say friends pointed it out to me. But like if say like say if she was to point it out, like I'd be saying ah here I'm trying as well. But that'd be kind of you know not like a friendly competition thing. Well, it's kind of more like, like, someone is stronger than me, grand no big deal. It's kind of more of a health and fitness thing? You saying I'm unfit, is that what you're doing right now?

Interviewer

Right so the physical strength is associated with different things for you. So, is that an individual thing to you or would you associate it with how you present yourself as a man?

Interviewee

No it's a personal thing, not as a man. Again, look at it like, there's more than one type of strength as well.

Interviewer

Yeah, go on.

Interviewer

Yeah, there's like if you're going through a personal crisis, it's like when a person who is like, oh man, like I'm going through something traumatic right now.... like am I gonna go for the guy who is like oh cool, watch me lift this big heavy thing. Are you gonna listen to the person who's like, oh, look, I actually have the tools and the know how to talk and make like, you know, help you. Yeah, that's the thing. That's what a lot of lads I don't think get as well like, there's so many different types of strength and no one's like, the best at everything. There's always gonna be someone better than you, regardless of like, gender or like anything like that.

Interviewer

Mmmm, very interesting. And, on that we talked a little about...if you're going out with a girl and she could lift weights, you said that wouldn't bother you by the sounds of it. But you'd still like to be a bit stronger, just for yourself.

But what do you think about women in sports today? And we hear a lot about it on the tv. Do you think it is progressive or do you care, or maybe not care?

Interviewer

I actually don't think it's progressive enough right now. You mightn't call it a real sport. I still love wrestling. I watched it all the time growing up. And em, like the best women's wrestler in the world right now is Irish. Which is great. But it's like there's an entire thing now where a lot of women are having like, you know, like, anything goes matches, you know, and like they're throwing tables and stuff like that. And people are going like, well, that's a bit much well, no, it's a sport and they want to do it. Like you know what I mean, it's like it's entertainment, they want to do it or do it safely and they're really good at it. So like, what's the issue? Although I try not to tell people I'm a fan of wrestling, it has connotations (*jocular*). So, it's like, I just, I feel like especially in sports, I think you should be allowed to do whatever you want. Okay, I think you want to compete in any way you

want. It's like you should be able to do it.

Interviewer

Okay, brilliant, so sticking with that theme.....you're talking about wrestling, I'm not sure what other social or cultural stuff you're into, maybe music. Do you think there's any role models on the TV or in the public sphere, anyone who comes to mind....who would sort of have good masculine values? Or just someone you think is a good role model for men today....

Interviewee

So there is a punk band called propagandi. And my cousin the one who got me into them, he was the one who got me into everything right. This band propagandi. I love one of their albums and on the CD cover has this anarchy symbol and in each little section it says like anti racist, anti homophobia, anti transphobia, anti violence like that, right? But, I remember I listened to that album, and I just was like, whoa, and that entire album and there's one song in particular and listening to it, it's like dude, men need to be better. I remember listening to that song. And I was like, I was like, oh, yeah, it's good song. But then as I kind of got older, I was like, no, I have to kind of inherit a lot of these values.

Interviewer

Interesting

Interviewee

Yeah, like it's like that with a lot of punk and hardcore music. There is a lot of stuff like that where it's like, no, it's like you need to be not even someone that just men can look up to, that anyone can look up to. It's like because you know, especially in a lot of these scenes, stuff like that. Like there's a lot of scumbags out there. But it's like you be the person where if you walk into a room, everybody's like, okay, look, this is a good person. And if I have problems, I can talk to them, like feel safe around them. That's the most important thing. I know that it's like, it doesn't matter who you are. Or like, gender race orientation. I think you just know right? Like its like a walking safe space type of thing. I would say yeah, that's the only music I kind of really listen to now. Like so even, I would look up their values, especially with punk music. Look up, make sure they haven't said or aren't doing anything really dodgy. So it's Yeah, I would find that like what a lot of stuff I'm into But, wrestling, no. Like again. Now like a lot of like, there's a lot of LGBTQ plus representation everything in wrestling now and only in the past 10 years. So only now it is a bit more kind of left (*politically*) friendly. Where you know, you know, wrestling with a lot of the things like you have to be very forgiving when you watch it. So, I think now there's lot more diversity but 10 years ago, 15 years ago, definitely not.

Interviewer

That's very interesting. And what kind of values then, do you think that lead singer or band would have displayed that you appreciated or thought I want to be a bit more like this or I want to sort of have that myself a bit more. You mentioned safety?

Interviewee

So kind of more. Yeah, it's like, listen, I never kind of, again, like every lad. I don't care who you are, well, maybe not now, I think because the younger generations kind of have a lot of stuff figured out before we did. I didn't figure it out so far until I was like least in like my early 20s. I was like how many lads even...do you know like we're all a little entitled, everyone always has something. You

know like, if I got rejected by a girl rather than just going like, oh, well, look, that sucks. I'd be like...oh no, that's just cuz she's a b*tch or whatever. You know, I mean, like, stuff like that. Like when I listen to music, like no, that's actually wrong. Like that is the wrong way to be like that. Like, I remember going into myself, like having a moment where I was like, like, Oh my God, you're right. And I can even pinpoint times when I was younger, where I was, like, if I could go back, like maybe one of behave this way or said this or don't like, you know, that type of thing or even like back in the day, like, even then. I know none of us are really kind of like homophobic or whatever. But like even look at the movies of like the things like the hangover, all that stuff. All the jokes were like the punchline was like, oh, yeah, it's probably because you're gay. So yeah, along the lines of that, and it was like it's only then when I when I did certain things, and I read certain books and everything was like....dude you can't actually do that. It's like because You're belittling people based on like, you know, like who they are. Which is terrible, like insults like, that's, I would say, like, a lot of that sort of stuff was distilled on me.

Interviewer

Again that's really interesting. Yeah, music is such a great proxy, isn't it?! Okay, so um yeah, so for our generation, and I think you've kind of touched on it a couple of times with you've said about the last ten to fifteen years. There's been a shift in your thinking and that sort of thing. And even alongside that some of the research I'm doing mentions an increased shift in advertising towards men. Such as products targeted at men having their hair done nicely, or like moisturizers, nivea for men all aimed at the appearance of men. So is that something that you've observed?

Interviewee

You know what....My friends and I used to have a joke about the lad culture thing, you know, I never....maybe it was because I always associated lad culture with people who are, you know, they'd throw something at you because you're different. I'm like man I'm wearing a misfits t-shirt man, leave me alone. Like I always associated it with that. But back then there was a culture, where they always have the same voice where its like *'quoar....out with the boys..the boys tonight...where's your girlfriend....quoar I'm leaving her at home.....yeah'* (said in an exaggerated voice) But, you know, like that sort of thing, which I always hated or I remember when I went to the cinema, and we'd always be like, no, I'm not watching those ads, if I have to watch another WKD (*alcohol*) ad, with those lads all just being horrible to each other. It's like I'm actually going to strangle them through the screen like I can't watch. And it didn't matter even what it was. It was like McDonald's, which like kids eat by the way. It was like, things like that, like every ad was like drenched in, in sexism and like, you know, stuff where it's like, oh, the lynx (*antiperspirant*) ad, remember those ads.

Interviewer

Yes, the women chasing the man in the middle of the forest?

Interviewee

Yeah, it's like use this. I remember someone gave me like lynx as a Christmas present, I was thinking, I am burning this. Whereas now, I think ads are a lot better. Like even look at Gillette ads. They had that ad about like, you know, toxic masculinity being bad. They have like trans men on the ads and everything as well. And it was just, you know, that's, they've even noticed that like. Oh, my God, like that thing from ten and fifteen years ago. Hopefully, it's dead. Yeah, I hope it never goes back. But, it's there, there is a difference now, and I do think it's for the better and I think that the generation after us will be even better again, which would be good to me as well. Don't miss that. I don't miss

that at all.

Interviewer

Yeah, so you said around ten to fifteen years ago was when you noticed a change in advertising and the kind of you know, '*lads are going out tonight*' sort of thing. And what about this idea of you know, guys have a nice hair now and moisturizer and all that sort of thing. Is it more common now than it was ten to fifteen years ago? And is it something you care about?

Interviewee

One hundred percent. Definitely more common now.

Interviewer

Would you notice amongst your friends and your peer groups and guys at work?

Interviewee

Well yeah, the ones my age (*participant is 35 years old*). Yeah, absolutely. Like I remember. Like I said something, I made a joke about like, this was literally like, a week ago when I was sick. I remember one of my co-workers said.... 'Oh, you look really tired.' And I'm like, making a joke saying that's because I've been dragging around these bags under my eyes all day. And one of my coworker's went oh, cool yeah..... If you just actually buy this for your eyes. It will actually work. I use it all the time for mine. And I was like, dude you've been holding this information for me for the past while and you didn't tell me?! Cheers, man whoa, whereas, like now, even me, when I was like, 19 or 20 I would be like oh why are you talking about moisturiser?! But now it's like, dude why you've been holding this information from me what's going on?

Interviewer

Mmm, yeah. And do you think it's the culture that's changed around it or do you think you cared about moisturizer when you were 19 or 20?

Interviewee

It's like, if you look at movies from like the 70s or you seen people who are our age. They look like they're years older. Like, we all look younger today, better. No, it's true. It's true. Even like, I know, it's like, right, okay. Oh, well, things were different then it's like, not really. We're just looking after ourselves better and we just stay looking younger for longer. That's all.

Interviewer

We definitely look out for ourselves more these days. And do you think that kind of shaped a new identity for the way men present themselves in society as men today?

Interviewee

Do you know what, I do.

Interviewer

You do? Okay.

Interviewee

It's like if you go on a night out. I don't go to nightclubs or anything anymore. But like, sometimes we see people on the nights out it's like, right. Everyone now is very well dressed put together. You might argue they're all dressed the very same. We won't say anything about that. It's like I know we all go to pennies and everything but it's like, you can't make fun of me for still wearing band T shirts in my 30s. If these are all looking like an over the hill boyband, you know what I mean. But like, like you'll see them they're all well put together. So in the right situation. With a lot of lads. You could still see that snap. And it's like they're still you know, it's like, 'awe what are ya looking at?' (*implying rowdy or aggressive*) you still do get that even though I do find that some people it's like, right, they do dress present better. But given the certain opportunities, they're like, they will change like that. So now it's just like, Oh, cool. Oh, yeah, like that lad is still trying to start a fight with me. But now he's just very well moisturized. That's the difference now so.

Interviewer

So you said that lad trying to start a fight with me. And there is a potential to 'change back.' What do mean by that? To change back to what?

Interviewee

I think I am gonna come across as very snobbish here, right. But the standard lads who were kind of all like, right, don't have pints doing all that and maybe not even our age, but maybe even just a little bit older. The ones who are kind of pushing a little bit closer to 40. They haven't really changed in a way like even when I'm in work, I've noticed it's like, if I'm on the till (*in retail*), I'm like, right, lad's what are you's getting? And then one of them will be like, I'll have a mocha. And the others are like 'oooooooooh' (*mocking one another*). I'm like it's chocolate and coffee, big deal. Like, it's all caffeine, you can't determine someone's self-worth based on that. Yeah you still get that with lads. It's like older people doing it. It's people kind of like older and a just a bit older. Yeah, I do. Kind of like, the more we all kind of age out of going out and stuff like that. I think nights out will be a lot better too. I think we just missed that. We took a lot of the core ideals of like, even advertising everything about being a better person looking after yourselves. Well, I think that the younger generations might even like say, my younger brothers, I think they've all grasped that a little bit better. Yeah, and it's like so even there's times now where you're looking and it's like... there's like 18,19-, and 20-year-olds, and you're just like the things they say...I'm like oh, wow, like that is remarkably mature. It's like, I'm actually going to take stuff from you and try apply it for myself. You know?

Interviewer

So you have hit on some good points about masculinity and culture today. Keeping this mind, I would like to apply the food element to this. In the research I have been doing for this project and even kind of in my own observations.... it seems men are more likely to eat red meat than women. Women tend to stick to chicken or fish. Is this something you've observed or maybe noticed?

Interviewee

A hundred percent and even like a lot of my friends who are vegan...like even if they get a meat substitute....they wont admit it ya know....but like the lads will go for something that tastes more like red meat. And the women would get something that tastes like chicken or fish, definitely.

Interviewer

Right, and so like what do you think it is about red meat, or why do you think it is that men would be more...more likely to go for red meat substitutes? Or even if your mates would eat red meat what do you think it is about men with that choice?

Interviewee

I do think red meat is very loosely, or very strongly connected with masculinity. Like when you were younger, with cartoons like Fred Flintstone always had a massive piece of steak. Like Homer Simpson, all the masculine characters always ate red meat. Ya know all of them. And then things started to change a bit.... with people going to the gym and looking after themselves now its more like chicken and fish and that type of stuff. But even I can't eat handle a steak. Since I started eating other foods, its so heavy. I don't know if it's a psychological thing or what. Like I went out for a mates birthday a few months back. In the restaurant I ordered a burger, they were like how do you want it? I was like medium rare, yeah. The next day I was so sick, thinking why did I do that? But it was like all the lads are out tonight.....let's get burgers? Then we were all sick because we couldn't handle it anymore. But it was because the lads were doing it.

Interviewer

So it was almost an unconscious decision to say we will just get red meat?

Interviewee

Yeah, yeah it definitely was yeah. But then when stuff like that happens then you learn your lesson. You're like thinking we were just thinking oh look we're men lets just get burgers before we drink. And then the next day we're all complaining....oh our tummies hurt. So no, we're not men anymore, more like infants (*joking voice*)

Interviewer

So do you or would you ever abstain from meat?

Interviewee

Well, I've moved home with my parents, so at the moment there is a dinner cooked with meat. But there are certain foods I don't eat anymore, particularly heavy meats. But I go back to Canada a lot. I have two sets of friends there's the ones who go to fancy places with strange meat dishes and the ones who are vegan. I don't mind either. But if I was cooking for myself I would probably abstain from meat more often, yeah.

Interviewer

Ok, and if you were to abstain, why would you abstain from it?

Interviewee

Just for health reasons. And it's like I know, it's hard not to. I have vegan friends, when I am eating with them they say we're not going to judge you. But they do say stuff and it does bother me.

Interviewer

Are these male friends?

Interviewee

One of them is male who is very militant and he says...well you know you're eating this and you own a dog right?! And he is like there are people who have pigs as pets too. And I'm like dude I already feel bad enough. It's like, I just enjoy eating it. But I do yeah, I do kind of think about it everyone once in a while. But not enough at the moment. It is like if I don't drink, I just won't think about it. It might eventually happen with meat if I find a good substitute.

Interviewer

So this leads nicely into my next question. You've already mentioned that you have a mix of friends in your social circles who are vegetarian and vegan. What ratio would be male versus female?

Interviewee

It was more female at first. But that is rising a lot more now, for sure. Especially when friends are coupling up. There's a lot of like....'oh no, we're just going to be vegan together'. There's also a support thing like with people in work, if they can't eat certain foods, I won't eat that when I am working with them.

Interviewer

And what about men increasingly becoming vegetarian or vegan? Do you think that these men have different motivations to women? Do you think men and women abstain from eating meat for different reasons?

Interviewee

I would say, only from experience for them it was a lot about being shown something traumatic. Involving animals in factories.

Interviewer

Do you mean women were shown something traumatic?

Interviewee

I think both. I have a slightly different perspective because of the music me and my friends listen to. A lot of the music is about animal cruelty. Like one death metal band I listen to is called 'cattle decapitation.' And they are militant vegans. One of the tracks on their album was famously recorded in a slaughterhouse and has horrible noises of animals screaming in the background.

Interviewer

And how do you feel about that as someone who eats meat?

Interviewee

It's tough going. But then you just change the album. You can quickly forget about it. And I listen to something else. Ya know sometimes you listen to music that is just like fun. And then other times you listen and you're like oh god I'm a horrible person. But yeah, I think a lot of it is from the damage that's been done in like body issues. For men and women. Like I can't speak from experience obviously, but it's probably worse for women. And again, like entire industries are made up of preying on how people look. I notice a lot of vegan influencers on social media and stuff are totally playing on people's insecurities. It's like hey, if you want that summer body, it's like switch to the vegan diet. It's like you won't even have to do half the work. You know, so there's a few people I know who have attempted to go vegan. I even tried it myself because I thought oh cool, let's try this.

I bought into this..... oh cut out meat, eat raw vegetables and you can drop this weight really quickly. So there is a lot happening with that now.

Interviewer

Do you think that is men and women?

Interviewee

I think started as a lot more women and now men are catching up

Interviewer

Okay, so thinking about your different circles of friends, some eat meat, some don't. Even the night where all of the lads ordered burgers before pints. You seem quite adaptable and easy going yourself in that regard. But, with all of this in mind...could you ever imagine....or have you observed a man experiencing any sort of backlash for his choice to not eat meat?

Interviewee

I think, maybe, I don't kind of associate with this group of friends anymore. I could definitely still see them being like that. Even in the tweets they put on social media, or when I meet them in person, they still have that attitude. They'd probably say 'mmmmm, ooh, you've gone vegan now....are you looking after your figure....oooh'. Yeah I do think there is still a lot of that.

Interviewer

Yeah, and even taking it back a step from vegan. What about vegetarianism? Do you think it would be the same?

Interviewee

Oh the same. Because I think a lot of lads don't even know the difference. Even if someone was pescetarian they wouldn't know. It would just be....what are you eating...rabbit food? Like loads of men use that term, even my dad still uses that.

Interviewer

We're coming up to the last couple of wrap up questions. And coming back to what we were talking about earlier, the changes in the last 10 to 15 years. Do you think the ideals of masculinity have changed in recent years?

Interviewee

I do. And I do think now that people realise that masculinity, gender, it's all just a social construct. You will see a lot of men who refer to themselves as 'femme,' they will do drag and stuff like that. And then women who refer to themselves as 'masc,' masculine and stuff like that. Again, none of it matters. I think that is now becoming the norm. We will be the ones who are outdated in a few years and I only think that is a good thing.

Interviewer

To use your own phrase, we will 'age it out.' And coming back to traditional ideals of masculinity, do you think that for some men it stays the same?

Interviewee

Well, I do think that. But, again I think it is to do with upbringing. Or what they have been consuming all of their lives in terms of music and media. And even some would want to make the changes but are too afraid to. But it is still there, yeah. But I do think that will die out again as the new generations take over.

Interviewer

And the last question really is yourself. What about you? Are there any ideals of masculinity you would aspire to? Or is there anything relating to masculinity you aspire to?

Interviewee

Well, I say no. But I walk around with a massive beard, and that's my thing. If there's complaints in work they're like the big bearded man will sort it out. And I'm like shucks that's me, I'm the big bearded man, that's who they're talking about there (*laughing*). But ya know, its just, (*long pause*) it doesn't matter as much in a way anymore, sometimes I will get reminded of it and it's like oh right, yeah. But ya know like dudes all wear nail-polish on a night out now, who cares, ya know. But, I think I have just become a better version of myself in recent years. I think that is the same for a lot of lads they are improving on themselves too, to be honest.

Interviewer

Ok, um and what do you think they're improving on? Or what part of themselves, specifically relating to being men?

Interviewee

Mentality-wise. I do think the one thing that we do need to work on is like....there is still an inherent sense of like, sexism and entitlement that men have. And every lad is guilty of it. Its just when they are called out on it, how they react is the most important thing. For instance, one of my female friends, she is an ultra-feminist. I remember being on nights out with her and she was saying, yeah you really shouldn't say that about women. And I was thinking wow, yeah maybe that was a wrong thing to say. Please let me know if I say something like that again. Because, again it's not your job to educate men on how to be better. That's something they need to learn for themselves. I find that like a lot of men now are doing that. And they are trying, but obviously there is a lot of room for improvement. An awful lot!

Interviewer

That is all of my question wrapped up. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview with me.

